



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Carlsbad Caverns
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Carlsbad Caverns News Release

For Immediate Release
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Carlsbad Caverns in Bloom

If you haven't had the sensory treat of a mescal bean tree in full bloom, you should definitely visit Carlsbad Caverns National Park this spring. The elegant drooping blue flower clusters of mescal bean are an olfactory delight as well as a visual one. They fill the air with a perfume that has been likened to grape Kool-aid.

Mescal bean—also known as Texas mountain laurel, frijolillo, or by its scientific name of *Sophora secundiflora*—is a shrub or small tree that doesn't bloom reliably unless the year has had substantial precipitation. In 2004, the park received nearly 25 inches of rain; and already in 2005, the park has received nearly two inches.

Located on the edge of the Guadalupe Mountains in southeast New Mexico, the nearly 47,000-acre park includes 30,000 acres of shrubland and woodland. Its wildflower season is dominated by the flowering of perennial plants, especially shrubs and trees. Other early bloomers this year include the delightfully fragrant algerita (*Mahonia trifoliolata*), a close relative of the red barberry known from farther north and west. In March, their red flower buds are opening into yellow flowers and attracting a variety of bees and other insects. Another, more subtle early bloomer is javelina bush (*Condalia ericoides*)—a low, spiny shrub with miniscule leaves and tiny yellow flowers that attracts tiny bees. After that, it's a race to get a glimpse of the tiny red beaked fruits before the birds eat them all.

The numerous cactus species begin blooming in April and continue into July with a brilliant display of pinks, fuchsias, reds and yellows. Eleven different milkweeds bloom from summer to fall, with a grand finale bloom of orange butterflyweed and horsetail milkweed just in time for fall monarch butterfly migration.

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If 2005 is anything like last year, the wildflowers will be blooming through the spring and summer and into late fall, when the flowers of most of the more than 50 species of native grasses mature into colorful and elegant fruits. The park has almost 15,000 acres of grasslands. To highlight the season, the park is planning to hold a wildflower writing and art workshop in the fall.

There is no entrance fee to pay to see these beautiful blooms—enjoy the view from your car on the park's entrance road or Desert Loop Drive or get away from main road on one of park's hiking trails—there are more than 30 miles of trails on the surface.

For more information on the amazing array of wildflowers at Carlsbad Caverns National Park or for more information on the wildflower writing and art workshop, contact park biologist Rene West at 505.785.3099.

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